

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

BLM Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plans Disturbance Management Plan Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action

BLM Office	Billings, Dillon, Glasgow, Havre, Lewistown, Malta, and Miles City Field Offices
NEPA PROJECT NUMBER	DOI-BLM-MT-2018-0005-CX
PROPOSED ACTION TITLE	Resource Management Plan Maintenance
LOCATION/LEGAL DESCRIPTION	GRSG Habitats in Billings, Dillon, Glasgow, Havre, Lewistown, Malta, and Miles City Field Offices
PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION	Plan Maintenance for the September 2015 BLM Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plans and Resource Management Plan Amendments

Land Use Plan (LUP) Conformance

Land Use Plan Name and Date	September 2015 BLM Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plans and Resource Management Plan Amendments
Existing Plan Review	<p>The Approved Resource Management Plans (ARMPs) for Billings, Dillon, Hi-Line, Lewistown, and Miles City are clear in their intent to align the BLM and the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Programs (MSGHCP or Program) once the state Program is operational and effective. This desire for consistency and the BLM's intent to adjust its plans to align with the State is specifically addressed in the following section of the ARMPs:</p> <p>“If the BLM determines that the State of Montana has adopted a GRSG Habitat Conservation Program that contains comparable components to those found in the State of Wyoming's Core Area Strategy including an all lands approach for calculating anthropogenic disturbances, a clear methodology for measuring the density of operations, and a fully operational Density Disturbance Calculation Tool, the 3% disturbance cap will be converted to a 5% cap for all sources of habitat alteration within an analysis area” (Billings ARMP page 2-18, Dillon</p>

	<p>ARMP page 2-12, Hi-Line ARMP page 2-18, Lewistown ARMP page 2-10, and Miles City ARMP page 2-10).</p> <p>In order to further align the two programs the BLM needs to determine that the MSGHCP is comparable to Wyoming's Core Area Strategy. This requires that the Program has a strategy that contains: (1) an all lands approach for calculating anthropogenic disturbances (2) a clear methodology for measuring the density of operations, and (3) a fully operational Density Disturbance Calculation Tool. These aspects are all clearly a part of the MSGHCP (as part of the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy). It is also clear that the State's Program, including the elements listed above, has been operational and effective since its inception in 2016.</p>
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COMPLIANCE WITH NEPA

The proposed action described above does not require the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), as it has been found to not individually or cumulatively have significant effects on the human environment. The applicable Categorical Exclusion reference is **516 DM 11.9 (J.1)** which states: *Maintaining land use plans in accordance with 43 CFR 1610.5-4.*

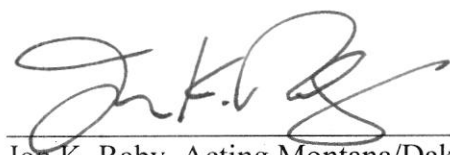
This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and, as documented below, none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

Extraordinary Circumstances		
1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: There would be no impacts to health and safety from clarifying that BLM is now following the State approach.
2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (EO 11990); floodplains (E O 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: There would be no impacts to unique areas from clarifying that BLM is now following the State approach.

3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102 (2) (E)].		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: This maintenance item clarifies that BLM is implementing the direction in the RMPs to move to following the State's GRSG approach once it is operational and effective. This action was part of the RMPs available to the public and no concerns were identified.
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: Effects are not unique or unknown. This is a plan maintenance item to clarify/implement what was analyzed in the RMPs.
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: No precedent is being established by maintaining the plans to coordinate with the State's GRSG program.
6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: No cumulative impacts from this plan maintenance item.
7. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the Bureau or office.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: No impacts to historic or cultural properties by this plan maintenance item.
8. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: Implementation of this portion of the RMPs will lead to an "all lands" approach to GRSG management, which would benefit GRSG habitat management; all impacts were disclosed in the RMPs.
9. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: No violations of law exist with this plan maintenance item.
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (EO 12898).		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: No impacts to low income or minority populations from this plan maintenance item.

11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007).		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: No impacts to sacred or religious sites from this plan maintenance item.
12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and EO 13112).		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rationale: No impacts to management of weeds from this plan maintenance item.

Given that the State's Program is operational and effective, I hereby approve the attached plan maintenance actions for the Billings, Dillon, Hi-Line, Judith (Lewistown), and Miles City Resource Management Plans.



Jon K. Raby, Acting Montana/Dakotas State Director

Date July 30, 2018

MT922:MPHILBIN:MT:X5041:7/23/2018:9. CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION.BLM GREATER SAGE-GROUSE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS DISTURBANCE MANAGEMENT PLAN MAINTENANCE.DOCX

Billings Field Office Resource Management Plan Maintenance Action

Background: The Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and Montana Executive Order 12-2015 together comprise the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy (MSGCS or Strategy). This Strategy, which is implemented through the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (MSGHCP or Program), includes an all lands approach for managing disturbance. Since its inception in 2016, the State's disturbance approach has been successfully analyzing projects across all ownerships. This led to the BLM's determination that the State Program (and Strategy) is operational, effective, and consistent with all BLM goals and objectives for sage grouse conservation.

Action: This maintenance action is to clarify that the BLM has determined that the State's all lands approach to analyzing disturbance is operational and effective. Therefore, the BLM will adopt and implement the State's approach as identified in Attachments D (Stipulations for Uses and Activities) and H (definitions) of Montana Executive Order 12-2015. Specifically:

Surface Disturbance: Surface disturbance will be limited to 5% of suitable sage grouse habitat averaged across the area affected by the project.

Maximum Disturbance Process: Uses and activities in Core Areas will be evaluated within the context of maximum allowable disturbance (disturbance percentages, location and number of disturbances) of suitable sage grouse habitat within the area affected by the project. The maximum disturbance allowed will be analyzed via a Density/Disturbance Calculation Tool (DDCT) process, similar to that currently utilized by the State of Wyoming. Unsuitable habitat occurring within the project area will not be included in the disturbance cap calculations. Existing disturbances shall be included.

Process Deviations and Exceptions: Any proposals for deviations from these stipulations, undefined activities, or exceptions must demonstrate that the proposed activities will not cause declines in sage grouse populations in core areas. Proposals to deviate from standard stipulations or utilize exceptions from standard stipulations will be considered by the Program (with review by MSGOT) and the appropriate land management and permitting agencies, with input from the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

This action will increase the level of consistency between the BLM and State of Montana helping to achieve more effective conservation across all lands, as clearly desired in both the ARMPs and the State's Strategy. To add further clarity, the term "core area" in the State's executive order is the equivalent of Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA) in the ARMPs.

RMP Consistency: This action does not change or alter any goal or objective within the ARMPs. This maintenance action is also fully consistent with all existing ARMPs goals and objectives related to sage grouse conservation.

State Program Coordination: This maintenance action is supported by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.

Dillon Field Office Resource Management Plan Maintenance Action

Background: The Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and Montana Executive Order 12-2015 together comprise the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy (MSGCS or Strategy). This Strategy, which is implemented through the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (MSGHCP or Program), includes an all lands approach for managing disturbance. Since its inception in 2016, the State's disturbance approach has been successfully analyzing projects across all ownerships. This led to the BLM's determination that the State Program (and Strategy) is operational, effective, and consistent with all BLM goals and objectives for sage grouse conservation.

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RMP Consistency: This action does not change or alter any goal or objective within the ARMPs. This maintenance action is also fully consistent with all existing ARMPs goals and objectives related to sage grouse conservation.

State Program Coordination: This maintenance action is supported by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.

Hi-Line Resource Management Plan Maintenance Action

Background: The Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and Montana Executive Order 12-2015 together comprise the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy (MSGCS or Strategy). This Strategy, which is implemented through the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (MSGHCP or Program), includes an all lands approach for managing disturbance. Since its inception in 2016, the State's disturbance approach has been successfully analyzing projects across all ownerships. This led to the BLM's determination that the State Program (and Strategy) is operational, effective, and consistent with all BLM goals and objectives for sage grouse conservation.

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RMP Consistency: This action does not change or alter any goal or objective within the ARMPs. This maintenance action is also fully consistent with all existing ARMPs goals and objectives related to sage grouse conservation.

State Program Coordination: This maintenance action is supported by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.

Lewistown Field Office Resource Management Plan Maintenance Action

Background: The Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and Montana Executive Order 12-2015 together comprise the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy (MSGCS or Strategy). This Strategy, which is implemented through the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (MSGHCP or Program), includes an all lands approach for managing disturbance. Since its inception in 2016, the State's disturbance approach has been successfully analyzing projects across all ownerships. This led to the BLM's determination that the State Program (and Strategy) is operational, effective, and consistent with all BLM goals and objectives for sage grouse conservation.

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State Program Coordination: This maintenance action is supported by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.

Miles City Field Office Resource Management Plan Maintenance Action

Background: The Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and Montana Executive Order 12-2015 together comprise the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy (MSGCS or Strategy). This Strategy, which is implemented through the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (MSGHCP or Program), includes an all lands approach for managing disturbance. Since its inception in 2016, the State's disturbance approach has been successfully analyzing projects across all ownerships. This led to the BLM's determination that the State Program (and Strategy) is operational, effective, and consistent with all BLM goals and objectives for sage grouse conservation.

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State Program Coordination: This maintenance action is supported by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.